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SUBJECT: ARENA UNVEILS NEW EXEC COMMITTEE

11. (U) Summary: The (center-right, pro-U.S.) ARENA party publicly unveiled its new Executive Committee (COENA) June 14 in front of an enthusiastic crowd of supporters. Former Salvadoran President and new COENA head Alfredo Cristiani addressed the ARENA faithful, calling for party unity as ARENA sets its sights on the 2012 and 2014 elections. Cristiani called for the creation of a Legislative Assembly working group to watch over public school curricula and ensure the preservation of democratic principles. End Summary.

12. (U) ARENA National Executive Committee met June 14 to ratify its new leaders; former President Alfredo Cristiani (1989-1994) will head the party along with a team of twelve mostly young ARENA politicians. Former Presidents Armando Calderon Sol (1994-1999) and Cristiani gave brief speeches to a large crowd of ARENA politicians and supporters. Although former President Antonio Saca was present center-stage, he kept a low profile; Saca neither spoke publicly nor was directly mentioned. Appeals in Cristiani's speech to look forward rather than to the past were not-too-subtle references to the Saca administration, which has quickly become the scapegoat for ARENA's March 15 election loss.

13. (U) Cristiani looked forward to the 2012 legislative and 2014 presidential elections; calling for unity, he proposed that ARENA reorganize the party, strengthen its eight sectors, become more inclusive, return to grass roots, and improve ties with ARENA mayors and deputies. Cristiani also declared that the Chief and Deputy Chief of the ARENA legislative bloc and mayors would be invited to weekly meetings. Voicing concerns over schoolchildren indoctrination by Cuban teachers, ARENA will form a working table at the Legislative Assembly to preserve democratic principles in public school curricula. In one of few direct references to the new President, Cristiani called Funes and his party a "government of two heads," referring to the lack of unity between the President and the (left-wing) FMLN.

14. (U) Comment: ARENA seems determined to recover quickly from a difficult election defeat. The party and its support base, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic showing at the COENA unveiling, are eager to become an assertive opposition to the new FMLN government.

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